



you to send a courier behind enemy lines and give your opponent's mech incorrect orders. So while it's defending the wrong place, you go to where you want to attack."

Commands. "They're basically played to improve your mechs. One of them is Enhancement, where you can take off some of your mech's weapons and replace them with better ones. Another we're calling Command Pilots, which brings the best pilots in the universe to your side and makes a specific mech of yours much more effective. And since this is a very espionage-filled universe, we also have Subterfuge, which allows you to find out what cards your opponent has."

As for the rules, Catino says they're a snap. "BattleTech is very simple. It has aspects of a lot of different trading card games. You'll say, 'This part reminds me of *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*. This part's kind of like *Magic*.' And the new stuff is very intuitive."

Garfield agrees. "BattleTech has a familiar structure, in that both sides are trying to do the most damage to each other. Whoever does the most, wins. So it's pretty easy to learn."

Here's how it works. Each player, taking the role of a leader in an interstellar war, draws a hand of five cards from his 60-card deck. At the beginning of a turn, a player draws two additional cards, then completes two activity phases. In phase one, he deploys any two cards from his hand, most likely resources and unfunded, unbuilt mechs. "This game allows you to put cards into play on credit," explains Garfield. "Mechs have deployment costs. An expensive

mech may cost so much that you can't pay for it all at once." To get a mech up and running, the player must continue to deploy resources. "Until you've paid for it completely, it's face down and subject to being attacked."

In phase two, the player sends his completed mechs to attack enemy mechs and resources. "They attack one at a time or in a group," says Garfield. "So I can tap a single mech of mine and say its attacking your mech. Or I can tap three of my mechs and say they're attacking a factory." If a factory or similar asset is under assault and the defender has deployed a mech to guard it, the guard can block and prevent the attack. But for the block to succeed, the guard must be moving at the same speed as the attacker or faster.

An attacking mech uses all of its weapons and enhancements—missiles, lasers, extra armor—to deal maximum damage to the target while minimizing damage to itself. If the defender has a mech involved in the skirmish, it too employs all of its offensive options to pulverize its opponent. "You can pretty much make as many attacks as you like per turn," says Garfield. "But of course, your mechs tap each time, so you're running out of them unless you use special effects cards to untap them. When you either run out of mechs to attack with or you decide you want to save all the rest of your mechs for defense, your turn's over." As the players take damage, they lose cards from their libraries. When a player runs out of cards, he's out of the game.

For Garfield, one of the most interesting aspects of *BattleTech* is the use of dice. "I used them very cautiously in *Netrunner*. I'm sort of expanding my use here." In *BattleTech* combat, players roll dice to resolve missile attacks, with the result determining the amount of damage. "Or you might have a particular pilot who can do some sort of suicidal move. On a roll of 1, 2, 3 or 4, the pilot goes to your scrap heap, which is like your graveyard or your discard pile. And on a 5 or 6, he goes back in your hand, so he might come back to haunt your opponent again."

"I think it's really easy to overuse or

misuse dice," says Garfield. "They have this sort of insidious tax on the game. Rolling a die doesn't seem like much, but if you're doing it constantly in every battle, it can wear you down. Here, it's not like every battle has die-rolling in it. But you'll have some in every game."

Short of using loaded dice, are there any surefire paths to victory? Probably not, says Garfield, but he offers a tip. "When building a deck, the first major decision you make is whether you want to have mostly fast little mechs—which can sprint over your opponent and get a lot of attacks in early—or have mostly big mechs." Godzilla-sized mechs sound good, but they tend to be slow and expensive. Still, Garfield leans towards the big guys. "In the end, big mechs are amazingly powerful. Just incredibly powerful."

The Art

"Inspiring." That's how Richard Garfield describes the nearly 350 pieces of original art acquired for the *BattleTech* CCG. Credit goes to Wizards of the Coast senior graphic designer Roger Coad, a 28-year-old illustrator from Mahomet, Ill., who's been part of the Wizards crew for about a year and a half. "We've tried to have a lot of fun with the *BattleTech* art," says Coad, who also helped with the art direction for *Magic*. "These are, in a sense, large toys. So it's kind of like playing army."

Coad came aboard the project early last summer. Assisted by staffer Courtney Colodner, he conceived the look of the game and supervised the legion of artists. "We're using quite a few of the *Magic* artists," says Coad. "We've also brought in a lot of new artists who've pleasantly surprised us." Among the *Magic* veterans are Randy Gallegos, Rob Alexander, Chris Rush, Pete Venters and Tom Wänerstrand. FASA staff artist Jeff Laubenstein is also pitching in, as is United Kingdom artist Dermot Power. "Dermot's been part of the UK comic industry. He's working on our logo. We're very excited about him."

Though Coad tries to stay out of his artists' way, he has definite expectations. "Everything has to relate directly to the existing *BattleTech* universe. So in providing descriptions to the artists, we have to make sure everything is very specific." The game calls